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Bi-weekly Newsletter

## >> Bulgarian Parliament to Sustain USAID Initiative

On February 23, Parliament Speaker Georgi Pirinski and Ambassador John Beyrle marked the close-out of The USAID Parliamentary Internship Program (PIP) at a ceremony held in the Bulgarian Parliament. The ceremony also featured certificate awards to graduating interns.

Over a period of six years, 220 students worked as volunteer legislative assistants at the Parliamentary Internship Program started with a USAID grant. Eighty-five percent of the students are law students, and the remaining are political science and international relations students. Speaker Pirinski stated that these interns played an important role in providing the MPs with the necessary independent and objective research support to craft laws.

The interns also completed independent legislative research studies on more than a hundred draft bills and amendments during three Bulgarian Parliaments. The program is a successful model of citizen participation in the legislative process and of employing bright young people for crafting legislation. The Parliament will continue funding the program on its own and will institutionalize it under its newly established research department. Ambassador Beyrle pointed out that "This program has proved to be yet another example of a successful US-Bulgarian partnership, a partnership with tangible results and a positive impact on the future of Bulgaria." ❖



*Parliamentary Speaker Georgi Pirinski and Ambassador Beyrle present a certificate to a participant in the successful Parliamentary Internship Program.*

*More photos available under [www.parliament.bg](http://www.parliament.bg) – Gallery – Meetings*

## >> Authentic Bulgaria Gains Speed

Tourism operators holding the Authentic Bulgaria Quality Mark, a USAID-supported initiative aimed at encouraging higher-value tourism, have taken the important step of forming an association to promote their interests and maintain a high standard among their members. Authentic Bulgaria held its constituent assembly on January 8, adopting bylaws of the new organization and selecting a Management Board. Meanwhile, the Authentic Bulgaria Guidebook was finalized and printed in January in English, Bulgarian and German. It includes features on all hotels and guest houses in Bulgaria which earned the Authentic Bulgaria Quality Mark through an independent assessment process. These accommodations offer personalized service, tasteful décor, fresh local products, architecture, a beautiful setting, and the rare opportunity to talk to hosts and experience Bulgaria on a more personal level.



In the beginning of February, the Authentic Bulgaria Quality Mark was presented at a specialized international expo for alternative travel, Reisepavillon, in Hannover, Germany. More than 300 exhibitors from 30 countries participated in the exhibition, which was visited by more than 18,000 people.

As a result of Authentic Bulgaria's participation in the expo, the program was promoted to a wide audience in a specialized travel industry, information was exchanged with consumers, other tourism companies, and the media, and contacts were established with organizations working in sustainable tourism in Western Europe, which opens up opportunities for the development of joint projects. ❖



*Part of the Authentic Bulgaria display in Hannover*

## **>> National Institute of Justice Takes Over USAID Local Court Trainings**

On February 7, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), a USAID legacy for Bulgaria, made a huge leap ahead in expanding and maximizing judicial training in the country through the introduction of the Local Court Training Plan Program sponsored by the USAID Judicial Strengthening Initiative. The NIJ gathered 46 judges and court clerks from 26 regional and district courts from different parts of the country to orient them to the new program. The NIJ will guide and support courts to organize trainings based on a local needs assessment, thus ensuring that each court receives the most needed and relevant training. The Local Court Training Plan program is tied to NIJ's Correspondent Judge Program in which each District Court identified a judge, who is responsible for providing constant training coordination between the court and the Institute and for organizing and delivering local level training.

In order to be considered eligible for funds for local trainings under the 2007 Local Court Training Program, each court must deliver at least one program focused on a priority issue such as: organized crime, money laundering, intellectual property rights, and trafficking in persons.

The new NIJ local training program is a successor of a similar program successfully implemented by the USAID Judicial Strengthening Initiative. Courts worked with universities, non-governmental and governmental organizations to deliver specific topics. Following the practice to transfer successful programs to the NIJ, the JSI staff trained the NIJ staff to manage the Local Court Training Plans. ❖